

T.F. Odenweller

The Inerrancy
of the Holy Scriptures

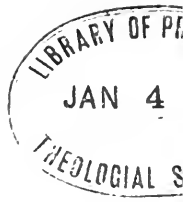
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VII.

THE INERRANCY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

IF THE Holy Scriptures contradict themselves; if they do not accord with authentic history, or if they are inconsistent with right theories of the physical, the social, the intellectual, the moral or the religious world, they are undoubtedly fallible. But if these writings are in harmony with all that is surest and highest, within the reach of human thought, we must admit that they are as free from error as divine thought can be in human language.

That there are errors in the most accurate translations of the Bible, and a few in the most reliable of the ancient manuscripts, is not seriously questioned. It is admitted by those who hold the theory of verbal inspiration in its most rigid form. But they maintain that these discrepancies were not in the original autographs, and that they are too few and insignificant to invalidate the doctrine of plenary inspiration. With such errors this paper has little or nothing to do. Our topic will be considered, not with reference to the textual, but the Higher Criticism.

Do the Holy Writings contradict themselves? Do they agree with contemporary profane history? Do they teach as science what is now known to be false? Is their moral philosophy immoral? Is their theology derived from that of a more ancient literature? Is it nothing more than the highest form of mythology? These and a multitude of similar questions arise before him who would study the Bible in the light of modern criticism. To answer these questions one by one would be useless. It would be like clipping the branches of a foul shrub. Other branches would at once arise. Our traditional theory about the Bible is the shrub. Let it be plucked up by the roots; we need not trouble ourselves about the branches.

In our day the Bible is passing through a new trial. Even some of its friends, being otherwise unable to separate the gold of inspiration from the dross of tradition, are casting all their religious teachings, their creeds, confessions, symbols of every kind, as well as the Bible, into the furnace of purification. This is well. Put on more fuel. Speed the blowers. Let the fires be made so hot that all will be consumed but the gold of divine truth.

The enemy of the Word of God may be expected to take advantage of the situation. He hates with an intense hatred the Book that has so persistently sought to master him. Now he thinks his foe is down in the dust, in the common dust, soon to be but dust under the flying wheels of Evolution's all-conquering chariot. The royal engineer of skepticism is planning to overturn the City of God. He has found in the Higher Criticism a *ποῦ στῶ* (*pou stoo*). This he will use as a fulcrum. He will put the short arm of the lever under the Holy City, and the long arm, the infinitely long, long arm of the lever—conceit and prejudice—he will load with the weight of his infinitesimal logic. If that lever were to lose its bite—what a fall! But if not, what then? It can be nothing serious, for “the length and the breadth and the height of the city are equal,” and, like any other cube, when it is thrown down it stands up. We need not fear the result of this experiment. Who can tell how great may be the advantage of our seeing the other side of this cube, and the very foundation on which so mighty a structure has rested for ages?

A hundred years ago, Paine, in the conclusion of the first part of his “Age of Reason,” said: “I have gone through the Bible as a man would go through a wood with an ax on his shoulder and fell trees. Here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them into the ground, but they will never grow again.” Have subsequent events justified his boast and fulfilled his prophecy? Were the books of the Bible utterly destroyed by Thomas Paine? No; in spite of his hatchet, the trees are still standing. Perhaps he only cut away some of the undergrowth and lopped off some of the dead limbs. Certain it is that the trees are still alive. They bear more fruit now than ever before.

A little more than a generation since arose the school of the lower or textual criticism. Up to that time the old manuscripts and ancient versions had not received such attention as the case demanded. As in every enterprise of this kind, Christians led the way. The work was scarcely suggested, when there was heard a deafening blast from the devil's trumpet, and all his hosts were ready for action, or, rather, for talking. They said, “The manuscripts vary; which is right?” Also, “The most ancient of them is the result of many recensions by uninspired, fallible men; how can we know that even it is correct?” It was claimed that none knew, or could know, with any reasonable degree of accuracy, what were the contents of these books in their original form. But our Christian scholars patiently performed their task. They studied all the versions of the Bible, ancient and modern. Every manuscript

was carefully examined. Every library was ransacked. Neither pains nor money was spared, that the question might be settled at once and forever. The result is abundantly satisfactory. We have a more intelligent faith than before. The gold has come from the furnace of textual criticism without the smell of fire, but with a purity and lustre surpassing all expectation.

But now the Higher Criticism confronts us. Its name may seem pretentious. It is not. It is rather modest. The superlative, rather than the comparative, should be used. It is the *highest criticism*. In the hands of some it may be *too high*, just as any criticism may become hyper-criticism. It is not a voracious monster of hideous shape and wondrous strength, that may be conjured up at any time by the enemies of truth and sent to ravage the fields of Zion and to devour the fairest. It consists in the study of the Bible as literature. It is, therefore, literary criticism. It differs from textual criticism as rhetoric differs from chirography. Only those who love the truth can apprehend its principles. One who hates the Scriptures cannot apply the method of the Higher Criticism, for its method differs from that of Mr. Paine as that of Blackstone differs from the method of the unscrupulous, Machiavelian advocate at the bar.

The Higher Criticism has given rise to the question of the errancy or inerrancy of the Scriptures as it has been considered in the discussion of the last few years. The discussion has not been satisfactory in every way. The disputants have been hampered. Their position compels them to hold that the Bible is inerrant in the sense in which the "Confession of Faith" declares it. They must also contend that the "Confession" is inerrant, for is not every material statement conclusively proven by the Scriptures? These soldiers have carried too much luggage into the battle. But Bellum enlisted for the war. His friends thought the dear boy should have the comforts of the old home in the camp, and on the weary march. His father gave him this; his mother that; his sister, another thing; and, likewise, grandfather, grandmother, and aunt, and uncle. When the poor fellow started for the war, he looked like a walking wardrobe, kitchen, bedroom, and variety store combined. When the veteran returned from the wars there was less on his back but more in his head. In the theologic wars of this age we must fight without *impedimenta*.

From the time of Jesus till now the Word of God has been made of non-effect through tradition. This was not intended. It was intended to make the Word more effective, to add brilliancy to the

sunbeam, and strength and beauty to the Damascus blade. Even to-day theological light-bearers parade the streets at noonday, and lift aloft the torches of tradition, and cry to one and all, "See the sun, the mighty and glorious sun, who bathes the earth with radiance, and pay us and praise us for holding the lights that you may see!"

The Bible is the citadel of the city of God. About it on every side have been constructed moats and ditches, walls and breastworks, redoubts and castles—every kind of defense known to theological warfare. Gen. Briggs occupies a strong, beautiful castle near the citadel. His fellow-soldiers are mighty men, descended from the giants of old, men of renown. This castle was violently shaken some years since, and some great stones were displaced. But Gen. Briggs thinks he has seen the walls rent from turret to foundation stone. The archers have hit him, and he is sore wounded. His fellow-soldiers would comfort him. They affirm that the castle, like the citadel, is impregnable, and that it can be as easily defended now as in ages past. But the wounded man feels that the walls have already failed, and in his perplexity he seems to doubt whether there is for us anywhere an impregnable fortress. To one tossed on the turbulent sea, mountain, sun and star seem to be unstable.

Our traditions and a traditional interpretation of the Word of God are accountable for our present unrest. When the Moses and Aaron of the great Reformation led the people of God out of the bondage of Papal tradition, they came to a great and terrible wilderness. Then the people cried, "Wherefore have you brought us into the wilderness to die? In the service of Rome we had bread enough, the infallible bread of tradition." Then the Bible was offered as the infallible bread. Highly seasoned with tradition, it was supposed to supply every need, or fancied need, for which secular, ecclesiastical, or philosophical Rome had attempted to provide. The Bible was thought to be a standard treatise on astronomy, civil government, and every other science then known, or ever to be discovered.

It has been held that the Bible is a literary ideal; that its diction is the purest, its syntax the most exact, and its turns of expression the most striking, and its imagery the most beautiful and graphic, that language has ever known. Why should it not be? Cannot the Spirit of God speak and write as well as man? Cannot the inspired Mark write as well as the uninspired Xenophon? Cannot Paul, the

inspired orator, surpass Demosthenes, who had no resource above the human?

No doubt the Lord could have caused every Biblical orator to speak with surpassing eloquence, and every sacred poet, with a divine afflatus, "to tower to the very stars with his exalted head." He could have made even the meanest character that appears in the drama of Revelation to use a language stiff with the gold embroidery of Cicero and Homer. If he had done so, all experience shows that the Bible would have failed to accomplish its purpose. No book with power to move the hearts and reform the lives of men has ever been the ideal of the *literati*. Is the Iliad such an ideal? Is the Æneid? There are blemishes in both. Shakespeare will exercise authority over all things human while time endures. Are his characters always the most refined? Do they always behave as gentlemen? Do they always speak the purest English? No. Even the fool has his part to play in the drama. He must show himself a fool in act and speech. Is this a blunder on the part of the "Myriad-minded?" Let not an inferior condemn the method of the Bard of Avon. The Bible is a drama on the grandest scale. God, angels, devils and men are the *dramatis personæ*. They all speak the language of the common people. Their diction is that of the home, the field, the battle, the market-place, the journey, the synagogue—rarely that of the study or the "poet's haunt." This drama is of surpassing power. Jehovah did not err in composing such a drama, for he intended that our faith should not stand in the wisdom of words, but in the power of God.

The biography of the Scriptures has been greatly misunderstood. We have made our ideal, which is a false one, the standard by which to judge the true. This ideal is of the past, of the convent, of the cloister. It floats in the atmosphere out of our reach. The biographer has tried to give this shadowy form a human body. We read of the boy who looked like an angel of light, lived like one his few years, and died with an angelic smile on his heaven-enlightened face. Our biographer *could* not save him from death, for no mortal can preserve so delicate a life. Such a life lengthened to three-score years and ten has become an ideal. When we compare the Bible characters with such a standard, they disappoint us. They are not boys, but men. They are of like passions with us. David's biographer was not permitted to slay the young man with the sword of Goliath, that he might tell a pretty story of childhood and youth. He has given us the life of a man. He has recorded David's hopes and disappointments, his struggles and his victories, his lapses and

his recoveries. The story stirs the soul to its lowest depths. It teaches the kindness and the mercy of God. It brings to the heart the knowledge of sin, and shows how noble it is to battle with evil. This the story of the angelic boy cannot do. The biography of the Bible is not at fault; but the hypothesis, born of the visions of cloistered monks and perpetuated by the dreamy impracticals of the present, is erroneous.

The theory that one inspired of the Spirit of God is emptied of all that is human and filled to the overflow with all that is divine, should be reconstructed—out of existence. It is often assumed, though not affirmed, that an inspired man must be infallible in private life. This assumption lurks behind the question, “How could Peter, an inspired man, err in his conduct, as Paul, another inspired man, affirmed that he did?” Such questions are absurd in the extreme. Inspiration does not take away free agency and make its subject a moralless automaton.

Moreover, it is assumed, in spite of the testimony of Jesus, that the prophet’s knowledge is as clearly defined and as comprehensive as that of Jehovah. It is forgotten that the finite cannot encompass the infinite. The mind of one prophet may move in a very narrow circle. That of another in a large one. Yet, though the circle be as great as that swept by the eagle eye of an Isaiah, it must touch the outskirts of the unknown. If to touch this boundary of the unknown is to err, then to be less than infinity is an error.

Many of the seeming errors of the Holy Writings arise from our failure to understand the language which God employs in his attempts to reveal to us his thoughts. Here no reference is intended to an ignorance of the original tongues, but to the inherent defectiveness of all known means of communication. God has chosen to speak to man in the language of man. That we may not fail to learn the world-embracing and age-lasting truth, he has given us “line upon line, and precept upon precept,” and example upon example. What if one line out of the many *seems* to us to be broken? What if we think we see a defect in one precept out a great multitude? What if two or three examples out of a thousand do seem to us inapposite or irrelevant? Such difficulties are found in our approach to all other knowledge. The sun seems to move about the earth, but he does not. He seems to move westward, but does not. The planets sometimes seem to turn back, but they do not. The astronomer passes these by until, with the aid of other phenomena, he grasps the great principles of his science.

Then all seeming irregularities disappear. So God has demonstrated the vital truths of the Christian religion. What if there are details in his argument that are hard to understand? Such difficulties cannot be avoided since the means of revelation are partly human and therefore partake of the imperfection of man.

The Omniscient could have made a language based upon his knowledge. He could have given to every word a fixed and definite signification, and caused it to beam with so bright a light that no other meaning could lurk in its shadow. He could have made for this language laws of syntax as inexorable as the rules of mensuration. Has he done so? Did he teach this language to the prophets and the apostles? Did he train them to be more exact in statement than the judge in his decision or Euclid in his demonstration? Do the books, paragraphs, sentences, clauses, and words of the Bible fit together as do the parts of a machine-made watch? So mechanical a language is possible with God, and a creature who can understand and appreciate it is also possible with him. But it is not suitable either to the mind or heart of man. Perhaps such a theory of the Scripture language is not affirmed. Certainly it is covertly assumed. Many a system of theology is built upon it. The conflicts of faith with unbelief are usually trials of this assumption. The present disturbance is no exception to the rule.

It should not be forgotten that the Bible is literature. It is determined by the rules of diction, syntax, figure, and other rules common to all language. Though divine, it is intensely human. The panorama of Revelation is painted in human language on the canvas of human history, human knowledge, human passion, human conflict, and human victory. It is the way to God. It is not a bridge that spans the raging cataract. It is a road resting upon the ground—common earth. It goes up and down the incline, through the dark tunnel and over the level plain, by the gentle hillside and the rocky precipice. It circles about the mountain, and seems to reverse its course and even to cross itself. And yet this is the way across the dark continent, and who travels this way will reach the land where suns never set.

If the Bible is literature its authors have the same liberties and licenses that are accorded to other writers. It is their privilege to be precise or not, as it may seem best to them. If one were to say it is 44 miles from this place to Des Moines, who would question either his veracity or his intelligence, because it is only 43 3-4 miles to the capital of Iowa? We have so treated the inspired writers. We have looked for a degree of accuracy that they do not claim and

we cannot find. The New Testament authors are fond of saying, "It is fulfilled." We have scrutinized every passage of the Old Testament in order to prove that the words introduced with this formula are in every case an exact quotation. A few of the quotations are not from the canonical books. Others are not accurate. Some are from the Septuagint, though that version is in many places little more than a paraphrase of the original Hebrew. Sometimes they agree, in jot and tittle, neither with the Hebrew nor with the Greek version.

The evangelists who quote from the parchment that was hung over the head of the Crucified surely do not mean to be precise. And what if one of them does say that at twilight it was dark, and another say that at the same time it was light? May not both speak the truth? "Who knows by what way the light is parted?" When does night pass into twilight? We are no nearer a solution of the problem than was the patriarch Job. But why demand of the Bible a precision that would bring any other literature into contempt?

Man sometimes thinks he would like more exactness in the physical world. He would have the ocean bounded with right lines, the rivers to divide the land into rectangles, the mountains rectangular pyramids, the slopes from mountain to sea regular inclines, the seasons to be more regular, and the sunshine and shade adjusted to an undeviating law. It is doubtful if a respectable variety of corn could be grown in circumstances so mathematical. And surely man could not live in so unpoetical a world. In the first generation he would perish of the *perpendicular monomania*.

Neither can the soul live in a rectangular spiritual world. The Bible is not fashioned after the principles of geometry. God has wisely given us the plain of Sharon, the heights of Lebanon, the valley of the Jordan with its meandering stream, and the mountains round about Jerusalem. By these the invisible, the ideal, the eternal, the divine, are round about his people and will be forever.

In its allusions to matters pertaining to natural history and other sciences, the Bible does not always anticipate the discoveries of later times. The notion that it should so anticipate, or that it does so, has given rise to many an egregious blunder. In a sermon of Dr. Parkhurst these words are found; "Let those who would prove that there are no mistakes in the Bible produce a cud-chewing coney, and then we will consider the question of inerrancy." He seems to think this one citation enough to convince all reasonable men. Now, it is true that the coney does not "chew the cud" in

the sense in which we use this phrase. This difficulty, like many another, has arisen from an attempt to square the Scripture statement with the scientific classification of the present day. The ancients did not go into the stomachs of the ox and the hare to find a basis for classifying the ruminants. They observed that these animals move their jaws in the same way. On this basis they rightly put the ox and the hare and the coney in the same class.

The history of the Hebrew word *rachamin*, and of the Greek word *splanchna*, suggests that the Hebrews and the Greeks thought the "quality of mercy" to be located in the lower part of the body. Though these words literally mean bowels, they are used in the sense of mercy without an intimation that a false theory may be lurking in the background. Whether the writers knew its falsity or not we may not know. They should not be expected to tell us. The prophets would have had an interminable task before them if they had undertaken to explain every word and phrase whose use might seem to suggest error on the part of others or ignorance on the part of themselves. Moses might have saved himself from a certain kind of criticism if he had explained that he recognized the difference between a spirit (*ruach*) and a zephyr. When Paul employs *splanchna* to represent mercy, he might have added parenthetically, "Please do not understand that I think that mercy has her seat in the bowels, for I know that her seat is in the head, just where the people of 1892 A. D. will *think* they know it to be." However scientific such a course would have been from a literary standpoint, it would have been unpardonable error.

The Bible should be held accountable only for what it clearly teaches, not for what it may suggest. The suggestions may be of the earth. Those who came to comfort Job not only suggested, but they actually taught untruth. Yet their statements are often quoted to-day just as if the Spirit of God approved them. Matthew has occasion to quote from the father of lies. What could he do better to show the character of the Evil One? Shall we believe and defend the liar because Matthew quotes him, and that, too, with disapproval? In the Book of Ecclesiastes Solomon tells his experience. He had tasted both good and evil. He balances the one against the other. The book is something like a discussion between his baser and his better nature. We are not bound to defend the suggestions of his baser passions. What if the base man, the licentious voluptuary, in his weariness and disgust, did cry out, "There is nothing new under the sun," shall we ransack the whole creation to prove the statement true? No. Solomon made the

assertion in a fit of despondency. He was not *then* inspired of the Holy Spirit, but by one of a very different sort.

Augustine advises, "*Distingue tempora, et concordabit scriptura.*" In line with this another teaches that, in our study of the Bible, certain questions should always be in mind. These are a key to unlock the treasures of truth. Briefly stated, the questions are, "*Quis? quid? ubi? quibus? auxiliis? cur? quomodo? quando?*" It may not be of the utmost importance that we should know the name of a writer or speaker, but it is of the greatest moment that we distinguish those whom God approves from those whom he disapproves. *What does he write?* Is it prose or poetry? parable or allegory? dialogue or drama? *Where does he write?* In Babylon or Judea? in Egypt or Greece? in a palace or in prison? *With what aids does he write?* What opportunities has he enjoyed? What language does he use? What are its facilities for expressing the author's ideas? *Why does he write?* What is the occasion? What is the purpose of the author? *When does he write?* Who are his contemporaries? Does he live under the starlight of the Patriarchal or under the sunlight of the Christian age? These questions seem to belong to the dialect of the Higher Criticism. But they are much older than the modern name of this science. The Higher Criticism is only a *renaissance*. Though some of its forms may need a *regeneration*, yet the movement as a whole is only a revival of a common sense study of the holy Scriptures.

This revival has its origin in the perplexing problems of the present age. For many years it has been increasingly more difficult to hold Christian truth in the symbols of the Middle Ages. To-day we are revolting from these symbols and are beginning to break the bonds of that method of Scripture interpretation to which Mediævalism gave birth. Time was when we studied the Bible as if it were a level plain. No difference was made between the declaration of Jesus on the mountain-top and the wail of Jeremiah in the valley. Each text, like each grain of sand in Sahara, was supposed to be equally valuable. He who had carefully studied the most texts, very much as one might study each grain of sand in the desert, was thought to know most in things pertaining to godliness. Suppose one were to study a work of art after this method. Let him scrutinize with a powerful microscope that wonderful painting, "Christ before Pilate," one eighty thousandth part at a time. What would be known of the picture after the study of a life time? If by chance a pin had been thrust through the canvas, our devoted student would examine the hole with not a

thought of its being a mere accident. Alas! for him who follows such a method in the study of that masterpiece—the Bible. He cannot realize its glory. The slight abrasions on its surface greatly perplex him. Not so with him who follows the better method. The splendor of the divine picture fills his soul. At a glance he recognizes the accidents through which it has passed. Yet not an idea, not even a shading from the pencil of the great artist has been lost.

To-day we apply ourselves to the texts and the books of the Bible with due attention to their environment. We use the field-glass as well as the microscope. To some this is no new thing. In the early part of this century there arose a class of heralds of the cross new to that time. A new voice was heard in the valley of the Mississippi, a voice as free as the air of the New World. It rang like a peal from the archangel's trumpet from lake to gulf. It has ascended the mountains on the east and the west, and crossed their summits into the regions beyond, and is going into all the world. Though few in numbers at first, these heralds are now a great multitude, invincible as the host of heaven.

Why so marvelous a result? They have only plied the key that unlocks the priceless treasure. "*Quis, quid, quibus, auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando?*" is that key. Let these words be written in letters of fire in the Christian empyrean to consume the false and make glorious the true. But what treasure has been unlocked? The "First Principles" of the true Christo-centric theology. We stand to-day in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Christian temple. "It is the last time." As Rome said of her mightiest enemy, "*Carthago delenda est,*" so we have declared of our wildest foe, "*Traditio delenda est.*" Only thus may the truth shine forth, bright as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners.

Let none fear the result of this last trial. God sends the storm and the earthquake. To-day a church built upon the traditions and commandments of men is mightily shaken. It may seem to the traditionalist that the sun and the stars of the religious heavens are about to fall. It is only the rocking of the earthquake. "This signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, that those things that cannot be shaken may remain."

T. F. ODENWELLER.

VIII.

POSITION OF BAPTISM IN THE ECONOMY OF GRACE.

This heading presupposes the belief that one is justified at this time in handling this subject *de novo* in a Quarterly article, and it is proposed to show that a man is saved by grace, is justified by faith when he is "baptized for the remission of sins;" and that being thus baptized, his act stands in thorough contrast both with Pharisaic legalism and with Romish sacramentalism.* One might perhaps be excused for confounding two things that are partially identical or that closely resemble each other; but the confusion of two things that are not only different, but mutually exclusive of each other and absolutely irreconcilable, is so utterly incompatible with the simple exercise of common sense that it admits of no easy explanation. There is nothing in common between a penitential petition for mercy and a boastful pretension to merit. "Baptism for remission," in the light of the Scriptures, is a prayer for the pardoning mercy of God. And we are not left to our intuitions to discern the radical contradiction between this act of reaching after grace, on the one hand, and the self-righteous assertion of legalistic claims, on the other. The ineffaceable contrast is forcibly emphasized in the Oracles of God. We read as follows: "After that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works which we did in righteousness, but according to his mercy he saved us through the bath† (*dia loutrou*) of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." Here in the original the pronoun for "we" is used by way of emphasis to distinguish any supposed "righteousness" to which *we* may lay claim as *ours* from God's method of saving us, "according to his mercy," and this "through the bath of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." This "bath of regeneration," then, is the embodiment of God's mercy, and stands in contrast with all self-righteousness claimed by men as based on pretensions to legalistic morality and personal excellence. And if by being "saved through the bath of regeneration" we are

* Using this word with broader meaning than Webster to denote the Romish doctrine of "sacramental grace."

† The word in the original is a substantive, not a participle.



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